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REPORT OF HOSPITAL COMMITTEE.

The Committee appointed under a resolution of this House, authorizing an examination into the medical department of the army, to enquire into the practical workings of the system, and to point out abuses, if any are found to exist, &c., beg leave to present the following report:

The resolution is very comprehensive in its character, as it appears to open up the whole field connected with our military operations. Confined, however, as the Committee have been, by the discharge of their regular duties as members of this body, they have only been enabled to make a personal examination of the hospitals in this city and its suburbs, and have been compelled to rely on other sources for information as to the workings of the system in the field.

We find that at this time there are some twenty hospitals in the city where sick and wounded soldiers are treated, and capable of accommodating some five or six thousand patients. They are partly under Government and State control, while others are under exclusive Government control. Those of them that are under State auspices receive rations or commutation therefor from the Government; the nurse hire is also paid and the medicines furnished. There is a scarcity of medicines to a considerable extent, and those having charge of State hospitals occasionally make purchases in addition to what is furnished them. The State hospitals are superior to those of the Government in two respects. We found the bedding more clean, and a greater amount of what might be called delicacies for the sick, as from the liberal State and private contributions a larger fund has been furnished with which to make purchases. In

all the hospitals there was found to be sufficient cleanliness in the floors and walls and in the culinary department; or we might use stronger language and say that in all these respects they are worthy of commendation. The same remark will apply to the food furnished, it being good in quality and well prepared. In all, too, so far as we could judge, the sick are kindly treated, and do not suffer for want of attention. The chief ground of complaint in the Government hospitals—with the exceptions presently to be named—was the want of cleanliness in the bedding; the sheets in many instances evidently being used too long without being changed.

While the Bird's Island Hospital, in common with other Government hospitals, is obnoxious to this criticism, we also found the vessels used in its wards, such as spittoons, etc., to receive too little attention, and to be somewhat offensive. The Government hospitals, that, in the particulars on which we are commenting, received the approval of the committee, on the General, the Banner, and Royster's Factory. The latter we mention particularly as being a model of neatness, and as reflecting great credit on those who have it in charge. We mention this with the greater pleasure, as it affords convincing proof that the present regulations, if properly enforced, are amply sufficient to afford our sick and wounded soldiers all the "aid and comfort" they could reasonably expect to find short of home. The attention of the committee was specially called to two very important subjects, to-wit: discharges and furloughs. The present system of procuring discharges is, in the unanimous opinion of the committee, very objectionable. The plan now adopted is as follows: The Surgeon makes application to the Surgeon-General; if the Surgeon-General approves of the application, he makes his endorsement, and it is then forwarded to the Captain under whom the sick man serves. He is expected also to approve, as well as the Colonel and the General commanding. In which case an order for the discharge of the applicant is issued and addressed to the Hospital Surgeon. Thus it will be seen the whole process is tedious, in the opinion of the committee wholly unnecessary, and wholly inefficient. Indeed, if the intention had been to keep disabled soldiers as long as possible in the wards of a hospital, breathing the impure air of such places, then the present system is one that is entitled to preference over all others, as it most effectually accomplishes that object. We call spe-

cial attention to the following objections to this system as above detailed. In the first place we would remark that the army officers are incapable of judging of the propriety or impropriety of the discharges, because of the fact that they have not seen the patient for weeks, it may be for months, and cannot, therefore, in the very nature of the case, have any personal knowledge of the condition of such patient. Again—the delay which must, of necessity result, as the experience of the last six months proves. The army is frequently moving, so that the application often fails to reach the military officer; or the officer may himself be sick, so as to be unable to attend to the matter; or his attention being taken up with other matters, that he may perchance consider of pressing importance, the papers are laid aside for the time being, or perhaps are entirely forgotten and never acted on at all, or until the attention of the officer is again called to the matter by the intervention of some friend of the sick man. At any rate your committee have seen patients in the hospitals of the city, utterly broken down in health, and who, notwithstanding the recommendation of both the Surgeon and the Surgeon-General, have waited in vain for months for a release from their present uncomfortable position. Both the interests of the service and the consideration of humanity imperatively demand that some more effectual mode of procuring discharges should be adopted.

It is now, too, exceedingly difficult to procure a furlough, while the committee are satisfied that cogent reasons may be given for the adoption of a more liberal policy in this matter. There are many convalescents who will still be in the hospitals weeks before being able to do duty. These patients would recover much more rapidly if on furlough, breathing the purer air and receiving the kinder attentions of home. The beds thus vacated could be appropriated to other patients, thus greatly increasing the capacity of the hospitals to accommodate a greater number of patients in a given time. One other fact is worthy of attention. It is now universally conceded that typhoid fever is, to a certain extent, a contagious affection. Now it often happens that convalescents from other diseases, as they linger for some time about the hospitals before being able to return to service, contract this serious malady, and in too many instances succumb under it. The testimony of the surgeons is uniform on this point. It is then, in the opinion of the committee, much to be desired that relief should, in this respect, be extended to our sick and suffering soldiers.

The committee would also call attention to one or two matters connected with the medical department in the field.

We think that the present arrangement allowing only one surgeon and one assistant surgeon is not sufficient to meet the wants of the service. The committee forbear, however, to enlarge on this point, but will only state that the surgeon general concurs in this opinion, and recommends that an additional assistant surgeon should be appointed for every regiment.

On enquiry, we find that the transportation for medical stores is insufficient. The wagons that were furnished for this purpose to the army of the Potomac have been used to a great extent for hauling wood and other articles, and the result has been that the wagons have been broken, and now there is scarcely any transportation of the kind, and a large amount of medicines, bandages, &c., have been, at various times, abandoned or destroyed. As a remedy, we would suggest that the use of such wagons should be limited absolutely to the transportation of medical stores.

The committee have thus given a fair and impartial statement of facts, and have made such suggestions as, in our opinion, would promote the public weal and add to the comfort and efficiency of those brave and patriotic men on whom the country relies in this hour of trial. All of which is most respectfully submitted.

J. P. RALLS,
Chairman Committee.

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